

AN
ADDRESS ⁷⁰

FROM THE

MINISTERS

OF THE

Western Calvinistical Association,

K TO THEIR RESPECTIVE

CHURCHES AND CONGREGATIONS

IN THE

FOLLOWING PLACES, viz.

ASHBURTON,

AXMINSTER,

BEER,

BRIDPORT,

BROADWAY,

EXETER,

EXMOUTH,

FORD,

KINGSBRIDGE,

NEWTON ABBOTT,

OTTERY,

PLYMOUTH,

STONEHOUSE,

TAUNTON,

TOTNESS,

UFFCULME,

WAYMOUTH,

WEYTOWN,

and WOODMILL.

Trowbridge :

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MINUTES.

OUR Association for this year (1795) was held at Plymouth 17th June. When the following order was observed.

THE preceding Evening, the Rev. Robert Crook prayed the Rev. ----- Giles of Exeter preached from Rom. 8. 15.

AT seven o'clock in the morning the ministers met for prayer private conversation when the Circular Address was read and proved.

THE Rev. Wm. Chaplin of Totness opened the public service the day by prayer and reading the Scriptures.

THE Rev. James Hook of Beer, engaged in prayer.

THE Rev. James Small of Axminster preached the doctrinal sermon from 2 Tim. 3. 16 former part: after which the following address, drawn up by the Rev. John Saltren was read to the Congregation.

THE Rev. Samuel Rooker concluded with prayer.

IN the evening the Rev. Alexander Ingis of Newton Abbot prayed,

THE Rev. Joseph Lamb of Weymouth preached the practical Sermon from 2 Cor. 5. 13. and former part of 14th. verse.

THE Rev. James Stoot of Ashburton concluded with prayer.

IT appeared from the Accounts given by the Ministers, of the state of religion in their respective Congregations; that unity generally prevails in them; that several churches have received considerable additions since the last Association; and that a desire generally prevails for the spread of the gospel, not only in Britain, but among the heathen.

THE next Association is to be held in Exeter, at the place where the Rev. Mr. Giles's congregation meet, on the Wednesday immediately preceding Midsummer day 1796. The Rev. James Small desired to draw up the Circular Address.

A N

A D D R E S S &c.

DEAR BRETHREN.

THE bold attempts of Infidels at the present day to set aside your regard for christianity by an opposition to its credibility, make it necessary that we should direct your attention to its evidences, that you may the more readily baffle their wicked designs. In the compass of a short address, we cannot enter much into the arguments in support of our holy religion: much less answer every frivolous objection, which the craftiness of men may suggest. But our attempt at present, is chiefly to stimulate such of you, who have neglected so important a duty, to examine its authenticity, with that attention and impartiality, which the magnitude of the subject requires.

THE scriptures of the old testament, which were committed to the Jewish nation, and which, notwithstanding their present conduct, they continue to venerate as the word of God, speak of the Messiah as a Redeemer who should come to Zion. In consequence

of which, that nation has been for many ages expecting him. It is therefore a strong argument in favour of Christianity, that Jesus Christ in every respect answers the many prophetick descriptions of the promised Saviour. To these prophecies Christ appeared, and the apostles reasoned from them with such success, that they were the means by which thousands of Jews, were very early convinced that Jesus was the Messiah; who embraced the gospel, and lived and died his faithful disciples. The prophecy of Daniel is so very particular respecting *him*, and the *time* when he should make reconciliation for iniquity, that some Jews in examining it have been converted to Christianity even in modern times.

“ IN the last century there was a public dispute at Venice between a Jew and a convert from Judaism concerning the sense of this prophecy. A noted Rabbi was chosen moderator and a great many Jews were present. The Christian urged his arguments against the Jews with so much force, that at length the Rabbi said, Let us shut up our books, for if we go on examining this prophecy any farther, we shall all become christians. It cannot be denied (added he) that the time of the Messiah's coming is already past but whether Jesus of Nazareth be the person, I cannot determine. The consequence of this was, that

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several Jews were converted; and one of them a very learned man, wrote a large book against the Jews, the preface to which he tells this story, as the means of his conversion." *

BUT even if the truth of the ancient scriptures had not been supported by miracles, and the fulfilment of so many prophecies; or suppose there had been no prediction respecting Jesus Christ in those writings; yet Christianity would have come sufficiently recommended by the splendid miracles which were wrought by the Lord Jesus and by his apostles in his name. If you had heard this wonderful Personage preaching the glad tidings of salvation, and saying that he came forth from the Father and was come into the world for the redemption of man: at the same time had you seen him work miracles of the most benevolent kind, and with a word give sight to the blind, healing to the lame, hearing to the deaf, the power of speech to the dumb, life and immediate health to the dead, and feeding many thousand people with a few loaves and fishes; would you not have thought it proper to have yielded him the fullest credit? Or had you seen the rest of the astonishing miracles which he wrought and had heard him say "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me, shall not walk

* Orton's Exposition, vol. 6.

in darkness but shall have the light of life: " Wo
 you not have believed him? You must indeed ha
 said with the Jewish ruler, " We know thou a
 teacher come from God: for no man can do the
 miracles which thou dost except God be with him.

IN addition to the miracles of Christ take into yo
 consideration his prophecies. You will find them
 be such as to give his disciples in a very short ti
 the most ample proof, that he was the true Messia
 He foretold his own sufferings, death and resur
 rection, with all their attendant circumstances. He
 pointed out the very disciple who would betray him
 and the other who would deny him. He told his
 disciples, that they should be offended and dese
 him. That he should be betrayed to the chief priest
 who after insults and abuses, should condemn him
 death, and that by them he should be delivered
 the Gentiles to mock, scourge and crucify him: tha
 the third day he should rise again from the dead an
 appear to his disciples in Galilee. In all these pr
 dictions you will perceive the most exact correspon
 dence with the subsequent events: by which our Lord
 designed to convince his disciples, that he was in tru
 the Messiah. " Now I tell you before it come, tha
 when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am
 he. "

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" We likewise wish you to examine that particular prophecy respecting the destruction of the city and people of Jerusalem. In which you may observe awful signs which were to precede this great event fulfilled in the most circumstantial manner. The calamity itself was to be so sudden and universal as to be compared to the lightning coming out of the north and shining unto the west. The sufferings of the Messiah before, at, and after the siege, were to be great beyond all example. The ruin of the temple was to be complete, that one stone was not to remain on another: and the city was to be levelled with the ground. All this was to take place in that present generation. Compare this prophecy of Christ with its fulfilment as related by Josephus, and you will be ready to imagine it to be a *history* of this dreadful judgement, rather than a *prediction* of the calamity, written about forty years before the event. The Jewish nation is at this very day a striking argument of the truth of the Redeemer's predictions. The Jews are dispersed over the world, according to our Lord's promise, and the desolate state of Jerusalem continues to this day. If therefore the truth of the Christian religion were to be tried by the fulfilment of its author's prophecies alone, its divinity we think would fully appear to every intelligent and impartial writer.

In examining the evidences of our religion presume you will attentively notice the *resurrection* of our Lord, not only as it is an invincible argument of its truth: but as it is one of the most important doctrines of Christianity. "If Christ be not raised your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." The Redeemer had repeatedly signified to his disciples his violent death he was about to suffer and that he should rise again from the dead the third day. Notice that this had been communicated to the chief priests, who urged it as a reason to Pilate, why they should take the precautions which they did, to prevent any opposition. But it was not the stone, the seal, or the Roman guard, which could prevent this mighty conqueror of death from rising triumphant from his grave. You will observe that his disciples who were chosen to be witnesses of his resurrection, were a set of credulous men, who were easily to be imposed on in an affair of this nature. The direct contrary of this was their character and they were deservedly upbraided for their unbelief. It was with the greatest reluctance they admitted this fact in particular, till they had received every demonstration of its truth, notwithstanding they had been taught to expect it and were early apprized of it by those who had indeed seen the Lord after his resurrection.

WH

WHEN Thomas was informed that Christ had appeared to the other disciples, he said he would not believe it, till he had seen and felt that it was the same who was crucified. In this you find he was particularly gratified. The Redeemer repeatedly showed himself to different companies of his disciples, he touched him, conversed with him, ate with him, and examined him to satisfy their doubts: and last he appeared to an assembly of more than five hundred of them together. Such numbers having declared that they had so frequently seen the Lord after his resurrection, could not be deceived themselves, that they should all so perfectly agree together to register to the world a falsehood, with no other prospect forward, than sufferings and death, is what no consistent mind can ever admit.

THIS will necessarily lead you more particularly to enquire, what reliance was to be placed on the testimony of the immediate disciples of Christ. They were the first publishers of Christianity, and wrote the history of the gospel and the epistles, recorded in the new testament. From this we trust you will receive the fullest satisfaction.

you will observe their excellent character. They were good men, men whose lives were wholly devoted to God, and whose conduct was influenced by the

the pure precepts and example of their master. They cannot therefore with any shadow of reason, be suspected of having endeavored to impose on mankind a system which they knew to be false. As propagators of Christianity, they were disinterested in the most eminent degree. This world's wealth was not a sufficient object to allure their exalted minds. They have a striking example of this upon record. In the primitive church a number of rich converts sold their lands, and brought the price of them to the apostles to be placed by them in a common fund for the support of the whole. Did they as mercenary men would have done, turn it to their own account? The reverse of this was their conduct. They called the society at large to choose proper persons to the management of this stock, into whose hands they transferred it, that as ambassadors of Christ they might be the more at liberty to attend to their important work. They knew it to be the will of their giver that those who preach the gospel should be free of the gospel. None of them however required more than a bare subsistence, and some of them even labored with their own hands that they might save their converts from this very trifling burden. You may perceive that they not only did not seek wealth, but even suffered the loss of what was their own. They gave up every earthly endearment such as their houses,

hands, their occupations, their friends, parents,
 children, and even their own countries also,
 they might seek the salvation of mankind. They
 went through the most extraordinary hard-
 ships in propagating the gospel. In every place
 where they carried the glad tidings, they met with
 enemies and fresh sufferings: that they could
 with great propriety "If in this life only, we
 hope in Christ we are of all men the most mi-
 serable." Even this could not deter them: nor did
 they count their very lives dear to themselves in the
 discharge of their mission: for most of them
 shed it with their blood. Men who meant to
 conquer the world could not have acted a part so
 interested, generous, and noble.
 But they had more than their excellent character,
 they gave Christianity to be a revelation from God.
 They were invested with the most *extraordinary powers*
 which were of vast importance to recommend them
 to the notice of mankind, and sufficient to prove the
 truth of their report. The disciples wrought a great
 number of miracles in the name of Jesus, to prove
 that they were his servants and that he was indeed
 God. Though they were originally a set of
 illiterate men, yet they were in a most astonish-
 ing manner made capable of under-
 standing the various languages of the nations and
 of

of proclaiming to the inhabitants of every country in their own native tongue the tidings of salvation. Thus they carried with them the most indisputable proofs of a divine mission: "God bearing witness both with signs and wonders and with miracles and gifts of the holy Ghost."

THEIR unparalleled success in preaching the gospel is a further reason, why their testimony should be credited. With no other visible arms, than those of meekness, humility, love, and the most virtuous conduct joined with the evidences already mentioned; friendless and unprotected they went forth to spread Christianity every where, against the formidable opposition of the most cruel tyrants, and their crafty councils. The gospel which they preached prevailed against all the resolution, strength, policy of the greatest empire that ever existed; triumphed over all the prejudices of the heathen world; their religion, customs, laws, policy, interest, vice, and even their philosophy were opposed to it. "It appears from the written history of the church, that before the destruction of Jerusalem the gospel was not only preached in lesser Asia, and Greece and Italy, the greatest part of action then in the world; but was likewise propagated as far northward as Scythia, as far

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as Ethiopia, as far eastward as Parthia and
as far westward as Spain and Britain." *
great success against so much opposition can no
be accounted for, but by believing that they
were ambassadors for God and that he was with
them in a truth.

The blessings which the world has derived from
Christianity is a further proof of its authenticity. It
has produced the greatest happiness, as well as order
in society. It has produced characters the most
valuable for devotion, zeal for God and purity of
life. Its promises have been found sufficient to sup-
port the mind of believers under the heaviest afflictions,
and make them exceedingly joyful, in the hour of
trouble.

Compare the blessed effects of Christianity
with those of infidelity. A religion so conducive to
the peace and felicity of men, must necessarily come
from heaven; and opposition to it can proceed only
from hell.

The limits of our address will not permit us
to enter upon the arguments which may be deduced
from the character of Christ, and the intrinsic excel-
lence of the sacred writings, which of themselves are
sufficient to prove the divine origin of Christianity.
We therefore refer you to those treatises which have
already been written on this subject.

THESE brethren are some of the evidences of an excellent religion which have convinced the wisest of mankind, and which we wish you to examine. Those men who speak and act in opposition to it, should at least bring some proof against so much testimony. But this has been done. It is wholly beyond their Conjecture, ridicule and bold assertions which certainly can have no weight with the truly convinced. They are meant to supply its place. Infidels who to despise the credulity of those who receive the religion without better evidences, are themselves so credulous as to maintain the most contemptible absurdities. They must believe that the apostles without the prospect of advantage and in full expectation of the greatest sufferings and most cruel deaths, crossed sea and land to assert facts of which they had no knowledge. They must suppose that the disciples of Christ were wicked men who went every where propagating the grossest falsehood with a view to teach the most exalted virtue. In short they must believe that the great author of Christianity, whose enemies allow to have been a pure and excellent character and who certainly gave every demonstration of his being the true Messiah, was never one of the vilest impostors. All this they must

at any testimony whatever. Persons who can
 such weak and impossible things should be
 with respect to the credulity of others.

In addition to every other argument which can be
 to prove the divine origin of Christianity,
 trust that many of you have a witness in your-
 of its truth. *. You have experienced its en-
 ning sanctifying and comforting influence on
 own minds, leading you to love its author, to
 in him for all your salvation, and to devote
 selves to him as his genuine disciples. Be assur-
 ed that all your acquaintance with the evi-
 of Christianity without this experimental
 ledge of its truth will be found insufficient to
 tute you sincere Christians.

If you are in possession of such a revelation of
 supported by the clearest testimony of its divine
 al, we exhort you to make the best use of such
 valuable treasure. Seek a growing acquaint-
 with its truly important doctrines, live upon
 mises, and act under the influence of its pre-

Teach this heavenly religion to your families
 the greatest industry and care. Endeavor to
 the attention of the young to this subject that
 be so established in the knowledge and belief of

John v. 10.

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the truth as not to be drawn aside by daring in
 who are beginning every where to shew themselves.
 Some of whom would reduce Christianity to a form
 of natural religion, by setting aside its peculiar
 rites, and others would destroy it altogether.
 earnestly for Zion's prosperity. Remember in
 petitions those zealous ministers of the gospel
 are willing to banish themselves from their country
 and every domestic and social enjoyment, to carry
 joyful tidings to the millions who are now perishing
 for lack of knowledge. "Assist those disinterested
 servants of God with your *property*, and thereby
 the sincerity of your prayers." And "finally brethren
 pray for us" that we may be diligent and faithful
 ourselves and that the "word of the Lord may
 have free course and be glorified with you."



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